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SUMMARY

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FORESTRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO A PERMANENT AGRICULTURE

By Tom GILL, President,
International Society of Tropical Foresters,
Washington, D.C.

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FORESTRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO A PERMANENT AGRICULTURE

Tom Gill, President
International Society of Tropical Foresters
Washington, D.C.

1. Introduction: This paper deals with the multiple ways in which forests are essential to agriculture and outlines measures for increasing their value to rural communities.

2. Agriculture and forestry share the same objective,--the best use of the soil for human good. In practice, food crops generally occupy the more fertile, level soils, while forests occupy the sterile uplands. Yet it is precisely in these uplands--often miles distant--that the fate of agriculture may be decided and where a forest cover may provide vital protection to the arable lands below.

3. Protection Forests: Steep, upland soils are frequently unstable beneath the impact of wind and rain, and when deprived of a plant cover they fill costly reservoirs and irrigation canals with dirt, mud and boulders, ruin farmlands with deposits of stone and silt, and add to the violence of floods.

4. Of all types of protective cover, forests have been found to be the most effective in holding soil in place. They also increase the soil's ability to absorb great quantities of water and so tend to equalize the flow of streams, minimizing both periods of peak water and times of drought.

5. In many countries, trees in the form of windbreaks or shelter-belts have long been utilized by the farmer. They afford protection to crops and farm animals from the hot, drying winds of summer and the gales of winter. Added to this are the very tangible benefits of reduced fuel consumption and greater living comfort in the farm homestead.

6. Production Forests: Properly managed forests are perpetual sources of materials needed on the farm. Fuelwood itself is one of the world's most important agricultural crops. Fence posts, timber for houses and barns, food for livestock,--all these products of the farm woodlands offer direct opportunities for cash savings. Furthermore, wood is a poor-land crop, enabling the farmer to profit from those portions of his land too rugged or too sterile for growing food.

7. Developing Farm-Forest Values: In designing an agricultural economy, intelligent planning demands that lands be used according to their suitability either for food crops, pasture or trees. Failure to do this has brought about severe social dislocations and has dotted the world with barren and eroding hectares--abandoned after futile attempts to force non-agricultural lands to produce permanent food crops.

8. "Farm foresters" have proven particularly helpful in agricultural communities.

These are men trained in the management and merchandising of farm woodlands and are employed by governments or other agencies to work directly with the farmer. Their task is to provide him with information and technical assistance.

9. Since farm forests usually occupy the most accessible and fertile soils, good management yields rich returns and for this reason farmers in many countries have become the foremost timber-land owners. The scientific knowledge that makes good management possible is best arrived at through research. Pilot tests, for example, may determine what tree species are most desirable from the standpoint of survival and rapidity of growth, and what are best for special uses such as windbreaks, soil retention and fuel.

10. Investigations of this type are beyond the financial means of the individual farmer but funds devoted to such research have proven to be among the best investments a government can make in seeking a stable and permanent agriculture.

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